DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 467 659 EA 031 774

TITLE	Mississippi's Plan for Student Achievement: Assessment, Accreditation, Accountability.
INSTITUTION	Mississippi State Dept. of Education, Jackson.
PUB DATE	2002-02-00
NOTE	15p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Mississippi Department of Education, Central High School, P.O. Box 771, 359 North West Street, Jackson, MS 39205. Tel: 601-359-3513; Web site: http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/. For full text: http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/extrel/pub/saread.pdf.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom (055)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Academic Achievement; *Academic Standards; *Accountability; Educational Administration; *Educational Change; Elementary Secondary Education; Program Descriptions; *State Standards
IDENTIFIERS	*Mississippi

ABSTRACT

This booklet outlines Mississippi's plan for raising student achievement. It discusses how Mississippi tried to avoid the problems that other states encountered when they tried to raise standards without strengthening core educational components, such as curriculum and teacher support. Mississippi called on hundreds of teachers to rewrite the curriculum for math and language arts, and then provided support and training to all teachers. The main portion of this new system was the emphasis on criterion-referenced tests designed to measure what is being taught. The individual elements of the new assessment system fit together to provide a comprehensive picture of students' strengths and weaknesses. Students in grades 3 and 7 will be expected to meet benchmarks for those grades based on the Mississippi Curriculum Test given each May. Student achievement will be reported as proficiency levels, such as advanced and proficient, and schools as a whole will have a chance to demonstrate success based on student performance. Furthermore, graduation requirements will include mastery of subject-area testing. The accountability time line that was imposed began with the setting of standards in Mississippi Subject Area assessments and will conclude with the formulation of a growth model. (RJM)

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Mississippi's Plan for Student Achievement:
Assessment, Accreditation, Accountability

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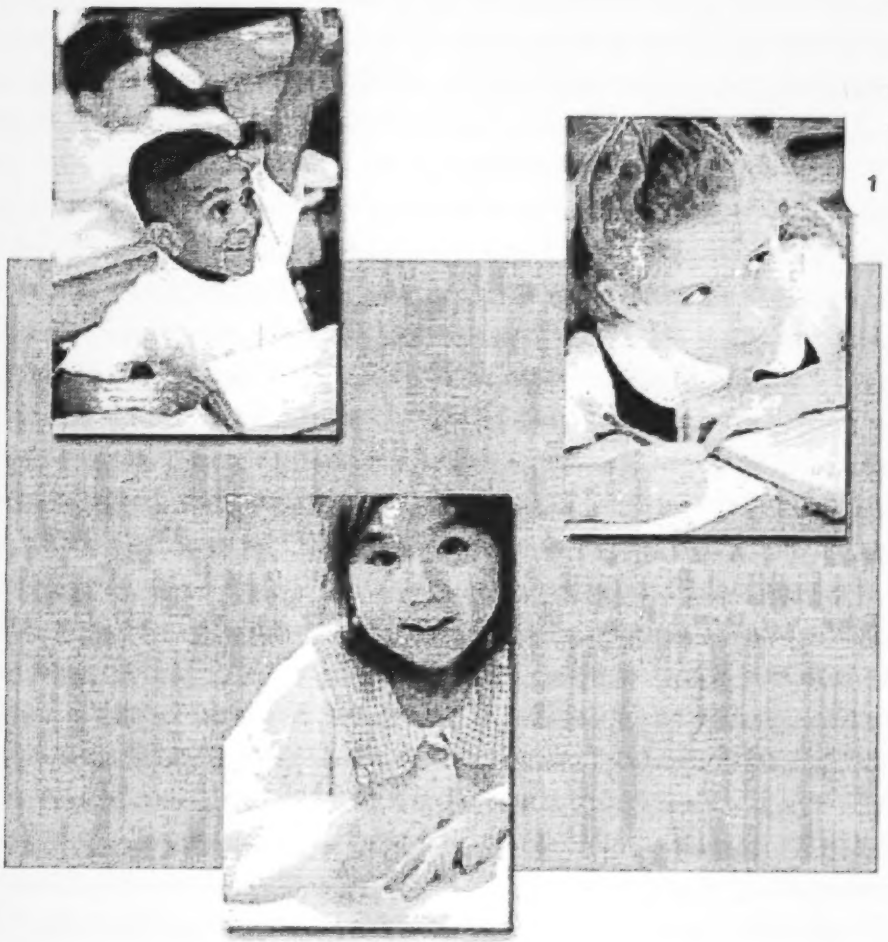

Mississippi Department of Education

February 2002

EA 031 774

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What Mississippians are saying...

"The big picture is making Mississippi and Mississippi students more productive. We need to do everything we can to really involve the grassroots, parents, and the business community at every school level."

Blake Wilson, President
Mississippi Economic Council

"We look at ways that we can teach the benchmarks through the arts, and share that with other teachers [music, drama, physical education, art and librarians]. They reinforce the skills that we are teaching in the classroom... so it is a community effort."

Amy Harrelson, fourth grade teacher
Madison Station Elementary School
Madison County School District

"I do think Mississippi is taking the right steps in improving student achievement. I believe our model is one we should be proud of, and that it's going to make a difference for our boys and girls. We're already beginning to see some of those improvements."

Dr. Carl Davis, Superintendent, Natchez-Adams School District

"Teachers should not feel alone. We are working to help involve communities so that they understand what the plan is about and so that families understand what their children are being asked to do."

Kelly Butler, Executive Director
National Parents for Public Schools

"We're all responsible for making sure that our state as a whole improves in the area of student achievement."

Pam Felder, Principal
Chastain Middle School
Jackson Public School District

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Student Achievement:

Assessment
Accreditation
Accountability

Today's students must be prepared to enter an increasingly competitive world. For this reason, Mississippi is strengthening student assessment, school accreditation, and accountability standards in an effort to raise student achievement.

Since September of 1999, the Mississippi Department of Education and the State Board of Education have worked to ensure a smooth transition to this new system. Other states have made mistakes by implementing higher student standards and new testing systems without strengthening other education components, like curriculum and teacher support.

Before new standards and tests were developed in Mississippi, hundreds of teachers helped to re-write the curriculum for mathematics and language arts. Support and training has been and will continue to be offered to teachers.

The Law

During the 1999 Legislative Session, the Mississippi Student Achievement Improvement Act of 1999, Senate Bill 2156, was passed requiring the State Board of Education to implement a performance-based accreditation system for both individual schools and school districts. This legislation also required the State Board of Education to set annual performance standards for each of the schools in the state and to measure the performance of each school against itself, using student growth and performance measures.

Senate Bill 2488, passed in 2000, further clarified requirements for establishing new accountability standards, making accreditation levels reflective of student performance at the school level rather than the district level. This 2000 legislation required school accreditation levels to be based on two criteria: (1) meeting an annual growth expectation in student achievement and (2) the percentage of students proficient at grade level. This legislation also established an intensive assistance program for schools not meeting the accreditation standards. For the first time, all components of a school – students, teachers, principals, superintendents, and school board members – are held accountable for student learning.

(See sections 37-16-6 dealing with testing and 37-17-6 and 37-17-13 dealing with accreditation. See section 37-18-1 to 37-18-7, MS Code, 1972 as amended.)

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Assessment Measures

The strength of this new system is the emphasis on criterion-referenced tests designed to directly measure what is being taught. Norm-referenced tests will continue to be administered in selected grades, providing data to compare the performance of students in Mississippi with the performance of students in other states, ensuring that Mississippi students are competitive at a national level.

The individual elements of the new assessment system fit together to provide a comprehensive picture of students' strengths and weaknesses.

Mississippi Curriculum Content Assessment System Components

K-2 Assessment

- Informal, developmentally-appropriate diagnostic assessments
- Districts may select from an approved list of vendors
- Suggested that teachers administer as a pre-test/post-test

Grade Level Testing Program (GLTP)

- Mississippi Curriculum Test in grades 2-8 reading, language, mathematics (**May administration**)
- Writing assessments in grades 4 and 7 (**March administration**)
- Norm-referenced test (Terra Nova) in grades 5 and 8 - reading/language and mathematics (**March administration**)

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Subject Area Testing Program (SATP)

- Algebra I, Biology I, U.S. History from 1877, English II with a writing component
- Writing assessment (**October** for 4X4 schools. **March** for all schools)
- SATP testing (**December** for 4X4 schools. **April** for all schools)
- Functional Literacy Exam (FLE) phased out over the next three years

More information is available at www.mde.k12.ms.us/acad/osa/.

Graduation Requirements

Beginning in school year 2001-2002, all SATP tests count for graduation; however, a student's graduation requirements are determined by the year he/she enters ninth grade.

Entering 9th graders:

•1999-00	FLE plus U.S. History from 1877
•2000-01	FLE Mathematics plus U.S. History from 1877 and English II
•2001-02	FLE Mathematics plus U.S. History from 1877, English II, and Biology I
•2002-03	U.S. History from 1877, English II, Biology I, and Algebra I (This group of students must pass all four subject area tests even if they take the course(s) prior to their ninth grade year.)

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Benchmarks for Grades 3 and 7

Students in grades 3 and 7 will be expected to meet benchmarks for those grades based on the Mississippi Curriculum Test given each May. Since score reports arrive in the districts mid-July, students will move on to grades 4 and 8 (unless they are retained for other reasons). Students who did not meet the benchmarks will be identified and will receive remediation during the first part of the school year. These students will be retested in January. If they reach the benchmarks, they are eligible to move on to grades 5 and 9, unless they are retained based on the district promotion/retention policy. Students who do not pass are referred to an External School Review Team. The team, using criteria set forth by the Mississippi Department of Education, will recommend retention or promotion to the school district. In 2004, based on this policy, the first group of students in grades 4 and 8 will be in jeopardy of retention.

For the first time, all components of a school – students, teachers, principals, superintendents, and school 'oard members– are held accountable for student learning.

Proficiency Levels

Student achievement will be reported as proficiency levels. These levels have been established and are as follows:

- **Advanced** - consistently perform in a manner clearly beyond that required to be successful at the next grade.
- **Proficient** - demonstrate solid academic performance and mastery of the content area knowledge and skills required for success at the next grade. Students who perform at this level are prepared to begin work on even more challenging material that is required at the next grade.
- **Basic** - demonstrate partial mastery of the content area knowledge and skills required for success at the next grade. Remediation may be necessary for these students.
- **Minimal** - below basic and do not demonstrate mastery of the content area knowledge and skills required for success at the next grade. These students require additional instruction and remediation in the basic skills that are necessary for success at the grade tested.

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Accreditation

Each school will have a chance to demonstrate success based on student performance. Beginning with school year 2001-2002, school districts received an accreditation status based on compliance with federal and state laws and State Board of Education policies.

Beginning in the fall of 2003, each school will be assigned a performance classification based on two criteria: 1) meeting an annual growth expectation and 2) the percent of students who are achieving at certain levels.

The growth expectations will be established by testing students annually and by following their progress. The lowest performing schools will be designated as Priority Schools. A major strength of the new accountability system is the assistance offered to Priority Schools. A seven-member team of practitioners will be assigned to each school for evaluation purposes. This team will provide the school with a report of strengths and weaknesses. A school improvement plan will be developed from this report with input from a local parent/citizen advisory council, the principal, superintendent, school board, and a majority of the teachers from the school. School improvement will be a local community effort. To access the Mississippi Public School Accountability Standards, visit www.mde.k12.ms.us/accred/accred.html.

Each school will have a chance to demonstrate success.

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Resources and Support

The Mississippi Department of Education recognizes the need for support in the implementation of this system. Available from the Department are publications for curriculum and remediation, training for teachers and administrators, technology support, technical assistance in resource allocation and program improvements, as well as parent informational brochures and guides. Additionally, each of Mississippi's school districts receives federal "flow-through" funds that may be used for a variety of support activities. These funds complement competitive grants, private grants, and state and local funds that may also be used by districts to target strategies for intervention, remediation, and other program implementation efforts.

No Child Left Behind

Recently, new federal legislation, the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*, was passed. While our state plan already has many of the components of the federal law, some adjustments and additions may be required. To access the complete law, visit www.ed.gov.

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Projected Accountability Implementation Timeline

July 2001

Standards were set for the Mississippi Subject Area Assessments.

September 2001

Standards were set for the Mississippi Curriculum Test (reading, language, mathematics – grades 2-8).

November 15, 2001

Districts received first reports containing scale score and achievement level data for individual students, classes, schools, and districts (from the May 2001 test).

Spring 2002

The Mississippi Curriculum Test and the Mississippi Subject Area Tests are administered.

July 15, 2002

Districts receive score reports containing scale score and achievement level data for individual students, classes, schools, and districts (from the May 2002 tests).

August - December 2002

Growth model is developed using two years of test data.

Spring 2003

The Mississippi Curriculum Test and the Mississippi Subject Area Tests are administered.

July 15, 2003

Districts receive score reports containing scale score and achievement level data for individual students, classes, schools, and districts (from the May 2003 tests).

August/September 2003

Growth model is run to establish actual 2003 growth expectations. School performance classifications are assigned based on achievement and growth. Some schools may be designated Priority Schools.

September 2003

Assistance teams begin working with Priority Schools.

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EFF-089 (3/2000)